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ABSTRACT

The sameness of and difference between autobiographical and biographical research methods were studied in this exploration of the researcher's work with six recent female immigrants to Canada, herself and her mother included. The self-study of autobiography and the biographical study of the researcher's mother and four other subjects were similar in that both approaches required the researcher to take uncertainty as the norm in the process of data collection and interpretation. The approaches differ in that the autobiographical work is mainly internal and inward directed, while the biographical approach is more external. To work with a live protagonist makes it possible to develop an intersubjective text influenced by the relationship between the researcher and the subject of study. A biography becomes autobiographical in what it tells about its author. (Contains nine references.) (SLD)

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A Narrative Inquiry of The Sameness of and Difference between My Autobiographical and Biographical Research Methods on New Immigrant Women

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, March 1997, Chicago

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Abstract

This paper explores the sameness of and the difference between autobiographical and biographical research methods in my study with six new immigrant women, including myself.

A narrative inquiry of my research methods was generated by four of my former adult ESL students', my mother' and my experiences with my study. As the writer of my own life and their biographer, I inquire into the boundaries of my two roles both in the process of data collecting and of writing. The difficulties in working on a collaborative biographical research with new immigrant women are described and discussed. The advantages and limitations in these two methods are compared. I found that they are similar in the ways that both require the researcher to take uncertainty as a norm in the process of data collecting and interpretation; and unique structure is needed for each individual new immigrant woman's life. They differ in the way that autobiographical research is mostly inward, while biographical method is more outward. To work with a live protagonist makes it possible to develop an intersubjective text. The marks of a biographer in the biography vary depending on the relationship. In her choices of structure and conceptualization, the biographer is revealed. A biography is autobiographical.

A Narrative Inquiry of the Sameness of and Difference between My Auto/Biographical Research Methods on New Immigrant Women

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....we teachers, ... must become students, students of *currere*, which is to say students of ourselves, before we can truthfully say we understand teaching....
Pinar, 1975:421

I began, in my master's program, with a narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin) of my personal curriculum. In the interaction with the outside world of varieties of curriculum theories and a narrative community, the inquiry led me deep into the reservoir of my memory. In the process of the study, I reconstructed stories of the past, learnt my personal philosophy, and recovered the meaning of curriculum. The program was finished in two years with the completion of my master's thesis: Moments of Improvisation in My Life Experience.

Immediately, I started my PhD program with an intention to extend and expand my master's thesis. I wanted to make my "pool of memory deeper, larger, and more complete", to borrow Pinar's words.

By going deeper into my autobiographical research, I found myself in an inevitable net of relationships. Many of these relationships were more current than what I had written about in my master's thesis. Circumstances did not allow me to write a collaborative

autobiographical master's thesis because I was too new in a foreign environment to have any long-term relationships yet with which to collaborate.

As time went on, I established some meaningful relationships in my new environment. That, I thought, would provide me with a long enough duration in order to take into account the complex constraints of my women immigrant participants and myself who need to reveal our unrecognized forms of oppression. I also thought that by including biographical research, I could learn from what Butt & Raymond claimed as potentially tremendous integrative, synergistic, and emancipating mode of curriculum research which permits research conducted in the middle of qualitative and quantitative methods(1987:88).

So, I picked some of my students and succeeded in negotiation with four of them to participate in my research. I chose them, because I had related to them more personally than most other adult ESL (English as a Second Language) students of mine at the time. We had, in different ways, established some bond, some -ship, on which we were traveling toward our respective futures. I wanted to learn from them how to find the wellsprings of my own being, and how to sustain myself. I chose them because they have value for myself and, I hope, for my readers. I chose them as participants in my research. I hoped that they all could become subjects some day in my research. I started with subjectivity; and hoped that I could reach intersubjectivity.

My mother also agreed to participate in my research. When I was preparing my proposal and later collecting data for the research, my mother was living with me. I had not been able to share my master's thesis writing process with her and other significant others in

my life. Now that I had her around, I thought, I'd better not to miss that again. So I talked about it with her and asked her if I could have her in my research. Her answer was also a question: "Why not?" When I asked her if she would sign an ethical consent form to participate, she did not think it was necessary. "I am your mother anyway. I can not escape," she said. She had been an entomologist for over 40 years. I did not think she ever needed to sign any forms with her "participants". But she eventually signed her ethical consent form when I insisted.

My proposal was approved in September 1993. Soon after that, I lost contact with one of my participants Dr. Li. The materials I had about her were from the case study I had done for the proposal. Without her permission, I could not use materials I had but not used for the proposal. About three years later, I came across her in a Chinese craft store in downtown Toronto. We briefly updated each other, and I gave her my new telephone number. She did not give me hers, although she convinced me to use what I had had from her for my dissertation.

I had informed her before she agreed to participate in my research that we would need a minimum six to seven sections of conversation with one hour for each. I had also mentioned to her my concern about the controlling man with whom she lived. We had worked out a tentative strategy to by pass his control in order for us to meet. Despite that, we lost contact and could not do anything more. She remained my participant only in the sense that I was allowed to use the materials. There was no collaboratively understood lived experience, although she was/is right here living in the same city where I live. Modern technology of communication could have made it very convenient for us to

dialogue and to share, given that we both were willing to. My initial assumption about our relationship-to-be was a mistake. What we had had did not guarantee what we would like to have. Now I can still feel the bond to her; she may feel it, too. But there has been no regular maintenance to allow this practical and time-consuming collaborative research to happen.

The bond, that ship we were sharing on our journey of life, is the experience of immigration. We connected with our mutual empathy and understanding in our immigrants' situation. We both had been professional women in our country of origin. She was a pediatrician; I an associate professor. We both had to meet the challenge of beginning from the very bottom of the society where our professional knowledge was of no value. We both had dreams to realize in our new chosen country of immigration. We are both single mothers, and had to leave our children behind in uncertainty.

It is also our new immigrants' situation that made it impossible for us to carry on a collaborative research. I needed to work with new immigrants because I am a new immigrant myself. But the uncertainties in her new immigrant's life disconnected us from a regular contact. And in her particular case, the oppression from the man with whom she was living and who took advantage of her new immigrant's situation isolated her from the rest of the world. Had she been able to function in English, had she known something about what was available in this society that could protect her, had she had some family she could go to in times of difficulties, had she been able to work as a pediatrician as she did in China and to be independent financially, had her retirement pension been worth the same or not so much less than it is in Canada, she would not have

had to stop our contact. Her new immigrant experience made her important for me and my research. Her new immigrant experience also made her a moving target, impossible for me to follow. I have to read the disconnection and interpret the silence from my side only.

I like her and deeply respect her. I had wanted to understand the world from her point of view. I, as a writer of her life, was allowed the imagination of form not the facts. But I did not have enough facts from her in order to get to know her well enough to make the shift from my projection to her subjective vantage point. I collected the information for my purpose, wrote stories from my understanding, and interpreted the stories solely. She did me a favor, because of the bond we had/have, to offer me complete authority to write and interpret her stories. At the same time, my responsibilities were not shared. I don't know how she will feel, some day, if she comes up to me, and asks for a copy of the stories, and reads them.

To write somebody's biography requires a tremendous amount of information, on-going exchange of ideas, and deep involvement intellectually and emotionally with the life you are writing about. You should only interpret and criticize after you learn to see things from your protagonist's point of view. In putting together the fragments of Dr. Li's stories, I could not do accordingly. I had to work with very minimum information in the light I had learnt about her.

With the second participant of mine Yanping, I had only two interviews that were held at her home. And her husband was with us in one of them. Because of her family

responsibilities, she decided to stop working with me and allowed me to use the information I collected during those two interviews.

We have kept a friendly relationship since then. Every year around the Chinese New Year, either she or her husband would call me to wish my happy new year.

No written autobiography was done by herself. Information I gathered was far from enough to write her biography. Based on the materials, I wrote stories about her. And those stories have the least sense of completion. No collaboration had happened during my writing. She has not yet seen my writing. On several of those new year's quick updating-greeting telephone conversations, I told her about the progressing of my writing and offered her a copy. She expressed her complete trust to me and no interest in reading it or having a copy. Yanping, too, remains my participant only in the sense that I was allowed to use the materials from the two interviews and from my case study done before the proposal

We are still in a bond with one another. We met at one point on our life's paths. And that meeting place was/is a haven as well as a springboard. As immigrant women, mothers, daughters, wives, we comforted, supported, and encouraged one another with what we did and what we said. As immigrant women, our stories of family responsibilities connected us in resonance (Colne, 1996).

Had she not been a new immigrant, she would not have to take one of the least paid jobs in Canada in her retirement after a life long career as an engineer. She would not have to take care of her 90 year-old mother on a daily basis in a country where the cultural norm is to send seniors to homes. She would not have to support a son in his late 20's to learn a

new language and start a new career. She would not have to come to my class and ask me to teach her how to say "Mind your own business" in order to protect herself at work. She would not have to stop collaborating with me in my research due to her overwhelming daily emergencies of family responsibilities.

I understand her, I feel for her from my immigration experience. But I could not have my research done to my satisfaction. I had to accept my reality as she had to accept hers. I am a new immigrant woman. I connect with immigrant women and I need to do research with them. But new immigrant's world is full of uncertainties, unpredictability, as much as the untold.

Compared with Dr. Li, Yanping was in a much better situation. She was less isolated; she had her family with her. She had her immediate family who came soon after she did and her extended family who came before she did and whose knowledge of immigration was a great help for her. Dr.Li came as a visitor and the long battle of application for her immigration made her depend completely on her sponsor. Yanping came as an immigrant which provided her with the right to work and to sponsor her husband and son independently. And she had a job, no matter how low her pay was. She had this connection with the outside world.

The research with my mother was not done as planned, either. My mother lived with me over two years. During the time, I had kept a journal which recorded and reflected on my observation of mother and my conversation with mother. She had also kept a journal about her immigration experience and changes she saw in me after a four years' gap. I had not done any interviews with her. My work with other participants was always more

difficult to coordinate. I thought the work with her could be done anytime. And this anytime never came until she decided to go back to China. That was not planned.

She had planned to come to Canada to help me take care of my son while I was working on my Ph.D. But she had no life here for herself. As a new immigrant woman in her retirement, she was in complete isolation from the outside world. Her two years' immigration experience had gone beyond her endurance. She suddenly decided to go back and for good.

I was/am happy for her choice. Actually I helped her to reach that decision for the sake of her health. But my research with her would be interrupted. So I asked her if she could leave a copy of her journal with me. She refused. Because she had written something about me that she didn't think I would like. I told her that was exactly what I needed. She would not give in no matter what I said, I even used the weapon of her ethical consent form.

She left and wrote me about the happiness in her life in China. I was/am happy for her decision. But what about my PhD ? I insisted, through lettering writing, that she gave me a copy of her journal writing and also write an autobiography. She kept silent. One year later, she did send back a copy of her journal with two pages of explanation. She had been through very difficult times here in Canada she said in the explanation. And I was the only person who could understand her and share her experience. But I had changed and became part of her pain. With the distance between us, she thought she could handle my possible reaction upon reading her journal. And she also gave me authority to use it. "I don't care what you think of me. I am telling the truth," she said

that in her letter. (MI 95, my translation). She did not write her autobiography. Her reason was that she had not had much happiness in her life to write about. But she sent me a 12-page memoir she wrote about her two years' experience in Canada.

With the material I have from her, I could not write a biography of hers. But I could add her perspectives into my autobiographical writing. And I did.

If I was not an immigrant, mother would not have been one. And I would not have lost her in such an unpredictable way, both in our mother-daughter relationship and researcher-participant relationship.

Nevertheless, my expected collaboration with Dr. Li, Yanping and mother stopped. I doubted, as a new immigrant, who was uprooted from the old land and not-yet-grounded in the new soil, could I ever do a collaborative autobiographical research with someone who was in the same boat as me. Should I switch to some more quantitative oriented research, conduct surveys with questionnaires, count the numbers, yes and no from acquaintance and strangers, and write an objective report?

Now I knew why so many of my new immigrant friends had to quit their research work or Ph.D. programs. Our own uncertain new immigrant's life and our unpredictable new immigrant social contacts made it more difficult to commit in a long term research. Many people had to stay within the ivory tower for research, or go back to their roots to collect data.

I, like those of us who are still in the ivory tower, consider myself more privileged than most new immigrants who could not continue with their careers. My reality is what is happening around me, including the interrupted research and the disappeared

participants. To describe them and to interpret them to the best of my knowledge is my ethics. To meet the challenge of writing incomplete stories is my responsibility.

It was a real challenge to write their stories based on very limited information I have about them. The incompleteness was too much, I was worried, that my readers would get frustrated by the fragmentation and could hardly make any sense out of it. And my imagination could not fill the gaps, either, because I don't know them enough.

It was a real struggle to interpret their stories because of the incompleteness both in their stories and in our relationships. I had no way to get any response from them about the stories. I did not know how they would have interpreted their stories or how they would like me to interpret their stories. They could not have their voices in my text.

Ethically, it was no better than writing about somebody in my autobiographical research without their consent. In case of autobiographical research, I claim all the credit and also, I am solely responsible for the blame. In the biographical studies with these three participants, they consented; and they are responsible for my use of the materials. I am protected. They fell into the traditional role of objects being observed. I was thrown into a powerful position over them.

Epistemologically, my text on them is subjective. There was no dialogue and interaction with them personally during my writing. I did not know how they would look at and think of what I wrote about their worlds, including me. I could not share my vantage point with them, neither could I see theirs. Through the study, I have an interpretation through a dialogue with the facts I had collected from them. But there has not been reciprocal response over the interpretation.

I, as a researcher, believe that if our researchers want to understand the thoughts of others, may they be one individual or a people, the whole analysis of experience must be based upon their concept, not ours. With Dr. Li, Yanping, and my mother, I failed to follow my own belief.

I have been able to follow Linda and Jane on their zigzagged paths of immigrants' life. Along the way, we have established a friendship that was becoming deeper and deeper and a bond that was going stronger and stronger.

To be able to connect with Linda in a long term relationship was unexpected. When I was explaining everything about our research to her, she repeatedly said: "Yes, Teacher Li." I interpreted it as her respect and courtesy to me, as her teacher and a friend who had helped her so that she needed to give something back to me. I was not sure how much she would be involved and how long would that last.

To know Linda took time. She is very shy, modest, and never believed that her story would be of any significance for my academic work. Questions very often would be answered with a smile, meaning "not a big deal" or with a long sigh, meaning "it's a long story", never wanting to mention it again.

Her way of thinking and the language she uses to express it are very different from mine. When I asked her something like "How is everything with you?" A typical response would be: "How is everything with you? Oh, Ok." "What did you do for a living in China?" Her response was: "What did you do for a living in China? Oh, me? No, no, no. Never mind. I did not do anything, not like you. My life was plain and dull," "Why plain and dull?" "Mmm, because,... nothing worth mentioning," (L2, 1993).

"Teacher Li, come to our temple. Do you know that the world will be ended by the year 2,000? I did not know this before I tell you this because you have been nice to me and we are good friends. Bring your son and your mother so that you will have a place to go and will be protected when the time comes," (L4, 1994). The simplicity, the seriousness and the sincerity in her tone stopped me from being sarcastic as I usually was. Instead, I worked out a time to go to her temple.

With her, I visited her two temples, went to her lawyer's office, met her potential boyfriends. Upon her request, I talked to the principal of her daughter's school, introduced her to a financial management consultant, talked to her landlord. I visited three apartments where she lived over a three year period. She visited me several times, brought me Buddhist books and told me the books were more convincing than she was. I did things with her and experienced life with her in an attempt to know her, to understand her concept, and to see her vantage point.

She is not an articulate person. She is not like most of my students both back in China and here in Canada who have received high education so that we could share, to a certain degree, a language. In her articulation, the semantic difference was as profound as in her learning style, which I had noticed when she was in my ESL class. There came the conflict of whether I should go with her style or she should get to know mine. In a classroom setting, we both had to make some effort to meet the other's. In my research, I did not think it was fair for her to change since my purpose of research was to know her and to learn from her. She should be my teacher. She seemed more a doer than a talker. In order for me to learn, the best way was to do things with her.

Based on the field notes and my reflective journals over one year's time (Nov. 93- Dec. 94), I wrote the first account of her biography of 62 pages and presented to her. It took us three meetings of 15 hours (Feb. 95) in total to go through it. Interpretation, translation, explanation, debates, defense, arguments, clarifications, and compromises were going on and on from both of us. At the end of our last session, she started to giggle and could not stop. "Look, (laugh) your face is so serious. I guess it is a serious business for you, right? (laugh) I'm flattered. I never knew my life could be so important and meaningful," (L15, 1995). It was rewarding for me, too.

Linda did not write her autobiography as I suggested. We had to work on her biography I had written. She did not write any memoir or keep any journal to share with me. I had to share mine with her. She did not articulate much. We did things together. And we both learned a lot about ourselves and one another in the process of doing things together, and sharing my writings with her.

I wrote another version of her biography, and presented to her for the second time. This time, more focus was on taking certain points deeper. I had not known I could reach some depth with her. And she had not known she could be philosophical either (L16, May 95).

I have not done any interpretation and analysis work yet with Linda's biography except the fragments in one chapter of my Ph.D. thesis. Among the four participants of mine, Linda is the most different from me. And she is also the one from whom I have learned the most. One of the major issues that came out of our sharing her biography was the semantic difference. To investigate our semantic difference philosophically and

linguistically and the relations with our cultures will need a separate dissertation. When I realized that, I arranged a meeting with her. I told her the limit of my Ph.D. dissertation and wanted to know how she would feel if I, after so much commitment from both of us, could not include it in my paper. She paused for half a minute, and, with a smile, said: "Are we still friends?"(L17, Sep.95).

I did not answer her with a yes or a no. She was not asking a question. She was making a conclusion. For her, friends are more important than anything else. I will complete a biography of hers and make it public after my Ph.D. dissertation. I made a promise to myself and to her.

Yes, we are still friends. I have less regular contact with her since I began writing other chapters of my dissertation. But we call and see one another when something important happens to us and when we need to share our ideas and emotions.

With Linda, my research is more complete and has more elements of collaboration in it. I felt confident to write about her and enjoyed sharing with her my writings about her. At times when we were doing things together and sharing my writings with her, I could suspend my own concept and moved into hers. I could see the necessity for her to believe sincerely in Buddhism; I could feel the craving in her for a peaceful relationship she deserves; I could hear her inner call for fairness for women. She won my deep respect and I like her. I could write her biography with both her and my voices in it. Intersubjectivity was happening between us.

Jane is the subject I focus on in my dissertation. She is the one of the five participants I have had in this research who has provided me with the most comprehensive materials,

and who is the most dedicated and involved. Her life stories are the most dramatic of the four, reflect various vicissitudes in the modern Chinese history, and reveal one of the most difficult categories of immigrants to Canada: conventional refugee. I chose her over Linda to focus on in this dissertation not because hers is more important. Linda's stories are equally important if not more. With the materials I have from two of them, my dissertation could only cover one in terms of scale and theme. The theme in Jane's story is more manageable in this dissertation of mine and there has been less semantic issues between Jane and me.

Timing, I learnt through this dissertation development, is important and self-discipline accordingly is of more value. While living an interrupted life and improvising fragments from life's given, I worked with four participants whose lives were equally, if not more, unpredictable in addition to making a living for my son, my mother for a period of time, and myself. The dynamic of moving from one to another is frustrating and challenging. Dates and months in the list of an account as follow may appear distinct. But there is always warming up before a start, and cleaning up after an end.

My proposal was approved September 93. I started research in October 93. In about one year's time till September 94, I had 31 journal entries with reflective records on my own cultural transformation experiences. The journals were basically done biweekly, and when special events happened. I had collected my theoretical memoirs with notes from and thoughts triggered by readings. I had done two interviews with Yanping, seven with Jane and nine with Linda. I began to write a biography of Linda from Sept.94 and did three more interviews in September, October, and December respectively. By February

95, I had the first draft of Linda's biography and met her three times during the month to share it with her. I had the second draft ready to present to her in May 95.

From June, 95, I began to work on Jane's biography based on autobiographical materials she wrote and recorded interviews I had collected. I was able to have a draft to present to her in July. During July and the first week of August, we met five times to work on the first draft together. During these intensive five sessions, we shared, we clarified, we translated back and forth between the two languages we were working with, we argued, we cooked, we ate, we laughed and we cried. More interviews had to be done and were recorded in each section; more exchanges of our life stories happened and field notes were made after each section which lasted six to seven hours.

By September 95, I had the second draft of Jane's biography ready. I had also had a draft of my autobiography which I had been writing all along the time simultaneously when I was working on Linda's and Jane's. I began to think of a table of contents for the dissertation in an effort to find my thesis. Going through all materials from myself and my participants, I realized that Jane and I had connected the most facets of our multiple selves. Since we met in 1991 as a teacher and a student, we had dialogued and grown, especially during the time of our research, in a way that had made our ways of thinking and ways of living different. They were different than before and they were different without our involvement in each other's life. So, I decided to try to write down our stories mingled, which I called A Spliced Story: A Dialogical Self.

Before I put a focus on this spliced story, I had to negotiate with Linda, as I mentioned before, to postpone any further work on her biography and make another plan after my Ph.D. dissertation to finish the work with her. That happened in September 1995.

From September 95 to June 96, I worked on the spliced story and wrote about 120 pages. The story was not finished. There was more to come about our mothering and being daughters in our situations as new immigrants. And I was becoming less happy than at the beginning of this spliced story writing. I needed to find a device to help me bring out insights for me, for Jane and for my readers.

In July and August 96, I re-read everything I had written in the past few years, including research data from participants, journal entries, my theoretic journals, story writings, biographical and autobiographical writings. I pulled out several topics and cut everything into pieces and put the pieces under different topics. That, later, became my most updated table of contents with seven chapters. The stories are no longer chronological. The topic in each chapter, I thought, would help me reach some depth.

From September 96, I began to write chapter two: To Live. It is a chapter about continuity. It continues on my master's thesis of improvisation and extends it to my life later during immigration to Canada and expands it to my four participants. It took me five months to finish this chapter. I enjoyed the process of writing and I was/am satisfied with the device of focus on a topic which could help me bring out some insights.

I was excited to have this found out after the first 20 pages of chapter two. With a topic, I could weave in my interpretation and theorizing. That was part of myself, which had

been lost for a long time in translation from Chinese to English and in immigration from China to Canada.

Writing Dr. Li and Yanping's fragments of biographies tells me, biographical research can be an aide to autobiographical research. And it can sometimes be better than autobiography to tell the untold.

Biography does not stand in the middle of objectivity and subjectivity. Although I did not imagine the facts about my participants, I chose the form, I decided on the topics and my voice is omnipresent. Themes, interpretations, and organizations are all mine. Therefore, the biographer is the biography. As Virginia Woolf said: "Yes, ...Writing lives is the devil!"

Writing Linda and Jane's biographies tells me that it is possible to approach some degree of intersubjectivity in biographical writing. If circumstances allow the writer and the protagonist to have a long-lasting relationship, if the relationship is reciprocal, if the writer does not have his or her own agenda and focus to start with, if the protagonist is equally able to learn and gain from her telling, writing, and sharing. To possess all these ifs in one relationship requires both luck and knowledge.

I did not have much luck with Dr. Li and Yanping to have long-lasting relationships. Our new immigrants' situations bonded us but not in a practical way to carry on a research which demanded regular commitment of time. They were overwhelmed by their basic every day living, with which I was not in a position to help, except understanding and sympathy. We could not share "a sense of family, or community"(Heilbrun, in Martin, 94:134).

I was not lucky even with my own mother. She had said that because we were in a mother-daughter ship, she could not escape. But she did. At least one foot of hers is not on my ship any more. That foot is called immigration. She had left her footprints on her two years' adventure in Canada and her marks of immigration in my life. But I haven't been able to connect with her deeper into our shared and different past in order to create a better present and future for both of us. We are in a life long relationship and we had lived under the same roof for two years, which was the longest since I turned fifteen when I was forced by the government to leave home for a re-education by the peasants on a commune during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. But the daily emergencies in our new immigrant lives did not allow us to reach the depth of one another.

I am lucky with Linda and Jane. Their basic everyday living was also overwhelming. But I was of some practical help and use to them. A mutual need has kept the relationship on a more regular basis. We have developed an interdependence between one another. My interviews and observations were very often carried out while I was helping them. I was giving Jane a complete course on English pronunciation during the summer when we were working on the draft of her biography. Linda came to my residence to pick up translations I had done for her divorce case when we had our seventh interview. We were like orphan sisters, depending on our joint forces to fulfill our respective tasks and to dream our harmonious dream.

I had some knowledge, both theoretical and practical, about relationships. I learnt more during the research. The first and the foremost is to be open minded equally to similarities and differences of Other. In relating to Other, we need to acknowledge the

similarity in Other: every individual is the same as a subject of her own right with a center of being equivalent to my own from where perspectives of a world is drawn. In relating to Other, we should recognize the differences in Other: each person is different as a world of her own with her eyes colored by her continuity from where her experience is lived and her style of knowing is accumulated.

This knowing is particularly important in relating to new immigrants. New immigrants have carried with them their cultural, social, and ethical knowing from their country of origin. They have been looking for their new cultural, social and ethical selves in their country of immigration. Their taken-for-granted and hand-downs are being challenged constantly by their new reality; their newly learnt values are being tested from all different angles cross-culturally; their multiple selves are very often in turmoil between the old and the new; their learning styles vary on an international scale; their understandings and expectations in relationships are diverse.

The first time I realized that people learn in different ways and people learn different points from the same story was in my first year teaching. The first time I realized that people as a group learn in different ways and learn different points from the same story was in my first year immigration. The first time I realized that people learn in a mixed way and learn mixed points from the same story was in my first year research work with my new immigrant participants.

The immigration process gives mixed cultural and social messages to new immigrants about themselves. In the case of my participants and myself, we are from a homogenous nation compared with Canada and our country of origin had had one the most ancient

history of totalitarianism in the world. We had been used to oppression and forced changes. We needed to unlearn totalitarianism in the practice of our freedom to choose, and to be responsible for our choices. We had to place into perspective the subtleties in a multicultural and democratic society. To share our mixed cultural and social aspects of learning during the research was/is comforting, affirming, and supporting in our experiences lived.

We are united in the commonality of being women and new immigrants. We have "sympathetic understanding" (Gadamer, 93:323) for one other.

During both the research (data collecting) time and the writing time, I was struggling with clear definitions of autobiographical and biographical researches. Connelly and Clandinin made it very clear by saying that "Autobiography is the telling of our own history, while biography is someone else reconstructing an individual's past." (1988:37). But how much of Other is there in telling of my own history? And how much of myself is there in reconstructing other individuals' past? If biographical study, as Butt & Raymond stated in 1987, permits research conducted "in the middle" of the qualitative and quantitative methods, does that mean in the middle of the objective and subjective? Or does it mean in the middle where two ways of world views merge, and become intersubjective?

I have not found the answers yet. But by staying with the questions during the research, my questions became the answers: It all depends on your relationship with yourself and with Other in the research.

To sum up the sameness and the difference in auto/biographical researches in my work with new immigrant women:

They are similar because both involved writing lives that are still being lived. Interactions and dialogues are allowed with the protagonists in the process of such researches. Therefore, endless variations and interpretations can be available. Changes and unpredictability need to be taken as the norm. The meanings from the "facts", which the auto/biographers are not supposed to change, do change. "There is no original meaning," as Gadamer put it so accurately. "Each interpretation not only sharpens, but also changes the meaning of the phenomenon that is interpreted."(1993:12).

Both needed to find a unique structure, the ideal shape, texture, and pace for the auto/biography. We new immigrant women's lives are "a tightly woven mesh of public and private events" (Wagner-Martin, 1994:6) across over more than one culture and country. Any single workable formula for such a life does not work. We need to create different structures to write these interconnected parts of new immigrant women's lives, including the incomplete phenomenon.

Both could be only done on a trustworthy researcher-participant relationship, that between the different "I's" in case of autobiography. Mutual respect, understanding, and like are essential for walking in the Other's shoes and seeing in the Other's vantage points so that a text that was formed in such relationship could reach a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1994:12).

They are different because autobiographical writing is mostly a solitary study of the inner world. It is the construction of what Pinar called "authentic humanity". And

"autobiography which makes self's architecture more complex moves below the surface of memory". By pushing back edges of memory, "the water and air of experience seep in, making the pool of memory larger, deeper, more complete." (Pinar, 1994). This task of self formation, deformation, learning, and unlearning requires the dismantling of self-defenses. Solitude is very often needed in this kind of dismantlement. In solitude, there is freedom. In freedom, there is creation. In creation, there is beauty.

Biographies are more focused outward, and the important "facts" of the protagonists' existence are more external. The biographer has her own points of view from outside of her protagonists, although, the biographer can try to write the interior world of her protagonists.

"Indeed the subject's inwardness can be recreated only in a limited way and only if sufficient self-communion has been bequeathed in diaries, letters, meditations, dreams." (Edel, 1984:16) With my live participants, Jane was the only one who worked a lot on her dreams, meditations, diaries and letters; and with whom I could recreate some inwardness. The limitation of writing the interior self of one's protagonist creates a dissatisfaction of incompleteness, imperfection, and a lack of vividness and emotion. Sympathetic understanding from Other can not replace the architecture of self. The reconstruction of an authentic humanity can benefit from the external interpretation.

"The poet is the poem; the novelist the novel; the playwright the play. Is the biographer the biography?"

...."Yes", said Virginia Woolf "Writing lives is the devil!"

Leon Edel, 1984 p.17

Underneath the similarities (of change and unpredictability as norm and of à need for unique structure), there is a difference (of outward and inward). Underneath the difference, there is a sameness (of autobiographical writing). The sameness and difference intertwine and interplay.

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